

No Shortgrass Doctor Prescribes Cow Work For Ruffled Nerves.

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MERTZON — Any director of western films worth a couple of thousand a week knows that the bawling of cattle is supposed to be the principal tranquilizing agent of the prairies. Millions of feet of film have been devoted to showing how calm and peaceful it is around a herd.

Perhaps this was true in the old days. For that matter it may still be so in some parts of ranchdom. But out here in the Shortgrass Country, the excitement of a roundup often reaches a pitch that would upset a veteran officer on the Berkeley, Calif. police force.

The best time to observe this sort of thing is when my Uncle Goat Whiskers takes a notion to work his cattle. By the time he gets the preliminaries rolling, there isn't one of us left who is calm enough to roll a corn shuck cigarette.

The other day, for example, the Boss's crew and I helped him mark his calves. It was a perfect day for the operation. The marking staff was exactly the correct size; one or two men could be standing in the gate and we still had enough help to drive the cattle over them.

The crew was well balanced, too. There was one boss for each man. It comprised a cross section of all age groups. And there was even a County Agent to represent the government. No details were omitted; every factor was present to assure a smooth marking procedure was going to take place.

The first break in these perfectly laid plans happened when we started working on the initial pen of calves. Before we had time to get good and dirty, it was apparent that the working condition wouldn't have passed the old time safety standards of a West Virginia coal mine. For one thing, we quickly learned that the County Agent had been mistakenly taught that worn-out blue jeans were sufficient armor against a 16-gauge, 3/4-inch vaccinating needle. Then, after two or three calves had hit the ground, we found that Goat Whiskers' chief of staff, his son, thought that running the quarry over the top of middle-aged flankers was funnier than the high point of the Jackie Gleason show.

To make matter worse, it was revealed that the mounted bosses must have decided that we groundlings were using this experiment to train for a daredevil circus act, because the nearest any of the chiefs ever came to expressing the slightest sympathy was an occasional "Whups, did that hurt you?"

Wrestling black calves was only part of the dangers planned in our behalf. When we started running the cows through the vaccinating chute and the corrals started giving out that awful creaking sound that goes with this type of work, it was easy to see the visitors' section coming down with acute cases of homesickness. By the time we realized it might take until Doomsday or shortly thereafter to get the shadow-kicking old sisters vaccinated, a number of the hands were stricken by that golden moment of cowboydom, when all drovers regret that they hadn't made railroading their career.

The dust boiled, the planks split, the language passed below the censorship line, and finally the last old cows was convinced that the chute gate was the only means of escape. In these closing moments the morale of the crew was a delicate as the nostrils of a flower show judge.

This afternoon we are going back to mark some more of Uncle Goat Whiskers' calves. If I live through the ordeal, I'm going to take some serious means to inform Hollywood that their impression of the tranquillity of a bawling herd may work just fine out on the coast, but down here where the sun's rays dance across the dust clouds it's a gross misconception.